

JOACHIM R. FRICK (1962–2011): IN MEMORIAM

Our friend and colleague Joachim R. Frick passed away in Berlin on December 16, 2011, after a valiant fight with cancer. He was 49 years old. With his death, the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin has lost one of its most brilliant minds. It was in large part his hard work and tireless dedication that made the SOEP the internationally networked research infrastructure that it is today. His numerous publications made a major contribution to applied economic research, particularly in the field of distributional analysis. His decades of unflagging commitment to the training of new generations of SOEP users will leave behind a major void.

Joachim was born in Trier on August 13, 1962. He studied economics, business, and sociology at the University of Trier and received an MA in Economics (Diplom-Volkswirt) in 1988. On a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), he attended graduate studies at Clark University in Worcester, MA (USA), where he gathered international experience that would play an extraordinarily significant role in his subsequent research and his work developing the SOEP study. In 1996, he received a PhD in Social Science (Dr. rer. soc.) from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Ruhr University Bochum with a dissertation entitled “Determinants of Regional Mobility.” In 2006, he was awarded his habilitation (*venia legendi*) qualification in empirical economic research at the Berlin University of Technology (TU Berlin), where he served as Acting Professor of Empirical Economics in the Faculty of Economics and Management from 2008 to 2009. Joachim began his work at DIW Berlin in January 1989. In 2004, he became Deputy Director of the SOEP and Head of the SOEP Research Data Center (SOEP-RDC), where his responsibilities included



coordinating the integration of SOEP data into international comparative panel databases (e.g., CNEF, ECHP, CHER, LIS, and LWS).

In fall of 2010, Joachim was offered a full professorship (W3-Professur) at his alma mater and hometown university in Trier. He came very close to accepting the appointment, but after wrestling with the decision at length, he declined the offer and chose instead to remain in Berlin. This decision was based on DIW Berlin's offer to create a joint professorship (S-Professur) for him that would allow him to continue in his position at the SOEP while holding a full professorship at the Berlin University of Technology (TU Berlin). The TU Berlin Faculty Council had already set the official appointment procedure in motion when Joachim's cancer was discovered and his treatment began. It is tragic that his illness prevented him from attaining this ultimate tribute to his outstanding achievements in research and teaching.

Over the past ten years, Joachim coordinated numerous externally funded projects, including many EU-financed research and infrastructural studies including the European Panel Users Network (EPUNet), European Panel Analysis Group (EPAG), and the Consortium of Household Panels for European Socio-Economic Research (CHER). He was Co-PI of a large-scale comparative analysis of social inequalities that was funded by the Russell Sage Foundation. His last major project, "Life Courses and Retirement Provisions in Transition," which was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, again broke new methodological ground in the statistical matching of SOEP data and administrative data.

Joachim's research interests centered on questions of social and welfare policy, and his work was consistently based on applied empirical analysis (focusing on issues of immigration, personal income distribution, housing costs, spatial mobility, and subjective well-being). Joachim also earned international recognition for his outstanding methodological work on the measurement of income (item non-response, imputation, and non-monetary income components).

He had a passion for working in collaboration with other researchers around the world, for sharing and discussing ideas and interests in the context of comparative research.

In his collaboration with Conchita D'Ambrosio, Joachim explored the relationship between two well-established concepts of measuring individual well-being: the concept of happiness, that is self-reported level of satisfaction with income and life, and relative deprivation, that is the gaps between the individual's income and the incomes of all individuals richer than him. In "Individual well-being in a dynamic perspective" making full use of the panel nature of the SOEP, empirical evidence is provided for well-being depending on absolute and on relative levels of income in a dynamic framework where both status and signal effects play a role. This finding holds after controlling for other influential factors in a multivariate setting. The main novelty of the paper is the consideration of dynamic aspects: the individual's own history as well as the relative income performance with respect to the others living in the society under analysis do play a major role in the assessment of individual well-being.

In his collaboration with Shlomo Yitzhaki, Edna Schechtman, Gert G. Wagner and Jan Goebel, Joachim examined a wildly discussed shortcoming of panel surveys, the potential bias which arises from selective attrition. The paper

“Using Analysis of Gini (ANOGI) for Detecting Whether Two Subsamples Represent the Same Universe” uses the fact that the SOEP is composed of different subsamples and contrasts two independently drawn panel subsamples started in 1984 and 2000. Empirical evidence is provided that the significant differences during the first two waves between these two samples with respect to income inequality are driven by changes in response behavior of short-term panel members rather than by attrition among members of the longer running sample.

In a further collaboration with Jan Goebel Joachim applies in the paper “Regional Income Stratification in Unified Germany using a Gini Decomposition Approach” the same method to reveal the development of income inequality and regional stratification in Germany after unification. The paper provides evidence that East Germany is still a stratum on its own when using post government income, but since 2001 no longer is when using pre-government income. These results remain stable when using alternatively defined regional classifications for West Germany.

In his collaboration with Markus M. Grabka, Joachim examined the relevance of imputed rental value for inequality research. Imputed rent is a fictitious income advantage of owner occupiers and of tenants which enjoy the provision of below market rents such as company houses or rent-free housing. It could be shown that elderly profit the most from imputed rent, in particular those owner occupiers without any outstanding mortgage debts. This is not only true for Germany but it has been shown for a number of countries. Another example of his collaboration with Markus M. Grabka and Eva Sierminski is the investigation of a gender wealth gap. Generally, information about wealth is surveyed at the household level by asking a reference person, thus a differentiation by sex is not possible—with the exemption for one-person households only. Joachim—as a member of the SOEP—got involved in changing the SOEP questionnaire, to allow for asking wealth information at the individual level in that survey. Thus, with the micro-data from the German SOEP it could be shown that there is a significant gender wealth gap of about 50,000 Euros between married men and women in Germany. Decomposition analyses reveal that this gap is mostly driven by differences in characteristics between men and women, the most important factor being the individual’s own income and labor market experience.

Joachim made research visits not only to many countries in Europe but also to the US and Australia, making numerous friends wherever he went. His international orientation was reflected as well in the many international conferences he attended, where his contribution as an internationally recognized scholar was always appreciated.

Joachim was member of numerous scientific committees including the Executive Council of the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS); the Scientific Board of the Swiss Household Panel (SHP); the International User Selection Panel of the European Centre for Analysis in the Social Sciences (ECASS) at the University of Essex, UK; the International User Selection Panel of the Integrated Research Infrastructure in the Socio-Economic Sciences (IRISS) at CEPS/INSTEAD, Luxembourg; and finally, he was appointed to the position of Council Member of the International Association for Research on Income and Wealth (IARIW). Besides

his activities on scientific committees, Joachim R. Frick was also a member of various organizations and institutions and was a longstanding member of the IARIW.

He will be greatly missed.

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Selected publications in refereed journals

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